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SUBJECT: U.S. ELECTIONS: MOZ ASKS "WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?"

¶1. SUMMARY: The Charge spoke on July 1 to an audience of 60 including members of civil society, the diplomatic community, several minority party leaders and press about the U.S. elections in a panel-debate hosted by the Center for Mozambican and International Studies (CEMO). Audience members focused on the possibility of an Obama administration and what that meant for Africa in general. Mozambican panelists lauded the U.S. electoral system, particularly for its inclusive progressiveness. Panelists and audience alike seemed mesmerized by the idea of a minority U.S. President with ties to Africa. Many in Mozambican civil society are concerned about how free and fair their own systems are in light of recent election-related irregularities and violence in Kenya and Zimbabwe. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On July 1 the Charge spoke to 60 members of civil society, academics, diplomatic corps, minority party leaders, and press about the U.S. elections in a panel-debate hosted by the Center for Mozambican and International Studies (CEMO), supported by a PAS grant. The Charge was joined on the panel by Ali Jamal, docent of the Superior Institute of International Relations (ISRI), and Salomao Moyana, editor of Magazine Independente.

OBAMA: AFRICA'S CANDIDATE

¶3. (U) Jamal reiterated a common local view that due to his African-American background, should Senator Obama win in November, Africa would reap the dividends both in greater U.S. interest and funding. The Charge reminded the audience of the unprecedented support provided by the current administration via the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). Moyana used the example of Obama to further his point that the U.S. electoral system is a constantly evolving, inclusive process, which developed over time thanks largely to the efforts of civil society. He explained that shortly after independence, only white male landowners could vote in U.S. elections, while today a minority candidate is in the running. Jamal highlighted the growing influence of minority and economic issues, as well as foreign affairs as contributing factors in U.S. voter's decision-making criteria come November.

IMAGINE A MINORITY PRESIDENT, CLOSE ELECTIONS IN MOZ

¶4. (U) The Charge challenged the audience to imagine a similar situation in Mozambique, including a strong electoral system in which a minority candidate could win the presidency via truly competitive elections. Panelists and audience members alike were visibly amused by this seemingly distant possibility. Moyana agreed that his country needed to work towards "more uncertainty" in elections which appear to be increasingly dominated by the ruling Frelimo party. Moyana also looked forward to a more mature Mozambican electoral

system in which voters would some day be more interested in a candidate's values than his background.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS SHOW SYMPTOMS OF OBAMA MANIA

¶5. (U) Audience questions centered largely around Senator Obama's chances in November and the U.S. economic and security agenda for Africa. One participant requested that the U.S. government "permit" Obama to win. The Charge responded that there is no sense in the U.S. electoral system of candidates seeking "permission" to win, as the decision rested wholly in the hands of the voters. In a variety of other venues, including the Embassy's 4th of July event, poloff noted a common appreciation of Senator Obama, which many appear to have adopted as "Africa's Candidate." Most Mozambican interlocutors echo panelist Jamal, believing that an Obama administration would significantly increase current USG commitments in Africa. Interestingly, questions about Senator McCain are relatively rare, and he seems to remain somewhat unknown to Mozambican interlocutors. One contact said he believed a McCain administration would continue largely along the same course as the current administration.

COMMENT: MOZAMBIQUE ELECTIONS: A WORK IN PROGRESS

¶6. (SBU) The Charge's participation with panelists and audience members at the CEMO event--while focused on the U.S. elections--provided an opportunity to gauge Mozambican

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perspectives on their own electoral system, with upcoming municipal elections in November and national elections scheduled for late-2009. Both Jamal and Moyana displayed positive perspectives on the U.S. electoral system and echoed great popular interest in the current U.S. presidential race.

The sense that the political establishment "permits" candidates to occupy positions within the government reveals the relative lack of power to affect change felt by Mozambicans. Panelists and audience members alike agreed that the current system lacks real competition, while some expressed concerns that the sanctity and primacy of the electoral system may not be a high priority for decision makers. Many in Mozambican civil society are concerned about how free and fair their own systems are in light of recent election-related irregularities and violence in Kenya and Zimbabwe.

Chapman